Acorn

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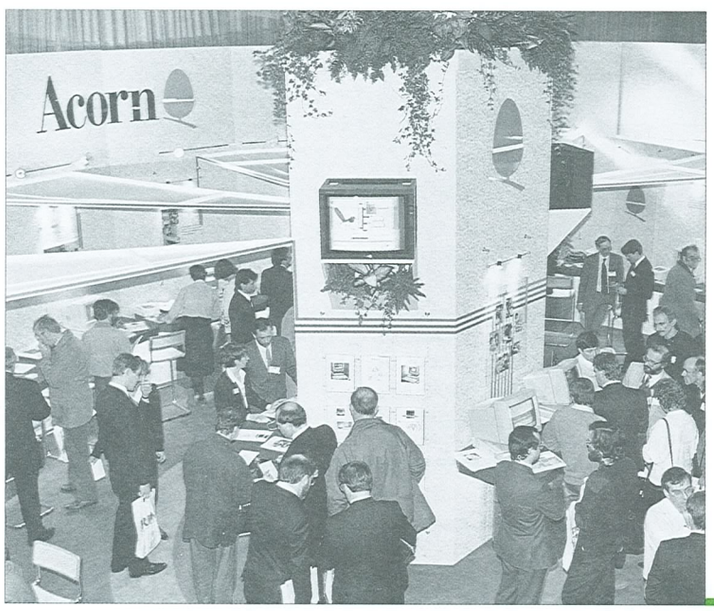
NEWS LETTER

Acorn dominates BETT show



One of the first principles of exhibiting in a show is to be as noticeable as possible. At the BETT show, held in January this year, Acorn's presence was so prominent that the competition was rendered virtually invisible.

In addition to our own stand, we had a fully networked Acorn 'village'. Before the show, we'd persuaded a large number of software houses to take stand space close to our main stand, and the area taken up by the different companies became the Acorn village. Within the village, visitors were able to see teams of primary schoolchildren and sixth-formers working away on our equipment. 'As a result,' says Kevin Roddis, 'Acorn appeared to be everywhere.'

Having such a strong presence at such an important show, and being supported by so many software houses, it's not surprising that Kevin enjoyed the show. But being there in force was only half the story.

'Last year we were having to sell Archimedes and RISC OS hard. Would-be purchasers weren't convinced there would be the appropriate level of software support. The market was wide open and local authorities didn't know which way to go. This year, everyone we spoke to who had decided to buy Archimedes was happy with their decision. And we spoke to some people who'd opted for the competition and were beginning to think they'd made a mistake.'

Los Angeles, Europe, BETT and relax

During January, many of you will have had a chance to meet some of our Australian and New Zealand colleagues. As well as helping out at BETT, they spent considerable time with different Acorn departments getting to know people face-to-face.

But what were they getting up to for the rest of the time? Our spies tell us that John Buchanan, Marketing Manager, New Zealand, arrived 'somewhere in Europe' with enough time to hire a car and drive round a few countries before the start of BETT.

Mark Sussex, Dealer Manager, New Zealand, went to Los Angeles for a couple of weeks with his sister and, as a result, arrived in England with a great deal of excess baggage (the shopping, not the sister).

Mark, or more correctly his shoes, made a great impact in LA. So much so that the locals frequently stopped him to say 'Man, you don't come from LA with shoes like that!'

In England, our Oz/NZ colleagues discovered that High Street prices are similar to their own but that there's more variety in London than in Auckland. Many made purchases in Hamleys which they pretended were for sons, daughters, nephews or nieces, but we know better!

After the BETT show everyone took a train from London to Cambridge. After piling all their luggage onto the train they were told to get it off and put it onto a bus. At another station they got off the bus. Then they got back on the bus and travelled for about an hour. Then they got on a train again and arrived in Cambridge five minutes later. Aren't the local railways wonderful?

After a week in Cambridge most of our visitors returned to work, but Ainsley decided to spend a further week driving around England followed by a 12-day coach tour of eight countries in continental Europe. Some people can never get enough of the inside of a bus!

Kiwis to import BETT show?

When asked what the Australians and New Zealanders thought of the BETT show, an English employee said:

'I think they were surprised to see what a force Acorn is over here. They don't have all the software we have here.'

Ainsley Lewis, Product and Training Manager, New Zealand, couldn't disagree more. 'I expected Acorn to be strong here. But I counted 20 computer shops in Tottenham Court Road and didn't see an Acorn product in one of them. However, we did find a second-hand model B in a chemist's shop at a greatly reduced price!'

'I can't deny it was good to be at a show where Acorn was the main attraction and was getting so much support. We import a lot of software into New Zealand but we don't have the people on the spot to back it up. There isn't anything comparable to the BETT show in New Zealand. I'd like to package it all up and take it home with me. We made a start by scrounging lots of free software and leaflets!'

Poms and Antipodeans swap ideas

Left to right, back: Peter Molloy, John Buchanan, Mark Sussex, Peter Revell, Simon Thompson, Bevan Leviston; front: Ainsley Lewis, Kate Turnbull-Moody, Glenda Graham, Shane Wharton

The Australians and New Zealanders had a very busy schedule during their visit with us in January. The first week was taken up with the BETT show. There, Acorn representatives from both sides of the globe discovered that their problems were very similar and that questions asked in England are very like questions asked Down Under.

Kate Turnbull-Moody was able to demonstrate how busy the show was by taking two-and-a-half hours to talk to a dozen software suppliers. She also won the award for scrounging, both at the BETT show and afterwards at Netherhall School where she laid claim to the last remaining copy of a useful booklet coveted by everyone present.

The visitors were interested in Netherhall School, where much of the software used in Australia and New Zealand originated.

'I was very impressed with the professionalism of all the Acorn people I saw', says Ainsley Lewis.

'Everyone was well prepared and no-one made us feel as if we were interrupting important work they wanted to get away to.

'I learned a lot about how Acorn is structured in England and how it works. The New Zealanders also learned a lot more about how Australia works too!'

Training dates to note

Janet Henson-Webb now has firm dates for many of the courses featured in your 'Training and Development 1991' booklet.

Two short courses on time management (featured on page 2 of your booklet) will be held on 30 April - 1 May and on 4 - 5 June. Effective reading and business writing courses will be held on 14 - 15 May and on 27 - 28 June.

Managing personal growth workshops for small groups of Acorn personnel are scheduled for 24 - 25 September and 8 - 9 October, but if you feel you would like to attend before then please get in touch with Janet as she may be able to book you into an earlier workshop.

We now have further details on the management development initiatives hinted at on page 8 of your booklet. We are planning a series of three-day courses, to be held in Cambridge in February, March and April. The courses will be run by Management Dynamics and will cover key management skills such as central management; planning; organising, directing and controlling; with added material on interpersonal skills and finance. Janet says this course would be 'ideal for the new manager and a valuable refresher for more experienced people.'

Warehouse staff recover in time for Christmas

What would you do if you had to do four months' work in just four weeks? At Coral Park they take challenges like this in their stride every Christmas.

December is always a busy month for Coral Park, but this Christmas was exceptional. Permanent staff Steward Diamond, Phil Coles, Kim Cornwall, Doug Shulman, Sandra Thomson, Graham Dunn and Mark Stephen were joined by volunteers from Newmarket Road to cope with the additional workload.

Ralph Snudden, Barry Carter, Doug Heathergreen, Simon Abbot, Dave Lumley, Murray Papworth and Mark Evans quickly developed their own system for assembling Learning Curve and Jet Set packages under the watchful – and sometimes amused – eyes of the regular team.

'They all did a very good job', says manager, Sandy Boyd. 'I think it's a good idea for others to see what happens here – our operation is just as critical to the well-being of the company as any other.'

Pressure was kept high throughout the pre-Christmas rush and, at its peak, up to 14 articulated lorries would be unloaded and loaded up in a single day, in spite of all kinds of difficulties.

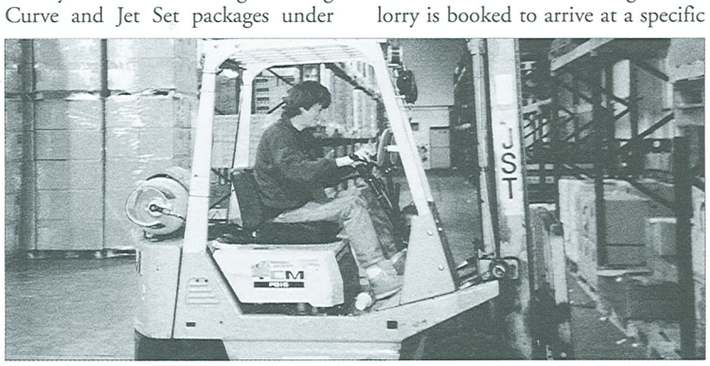
'To begin with we didn't have enough "pizza boxes" for Learning Curve', says Mark Stephen, who has just survived his seventh Christmas with Acorn. 'And although each lorry is booked to arrive at a specific time, they often don't come when they're supposed to. As we've only got one entrance, you can't load and unload at the same time, so the lorries have to queue.'

Doug Shulman is a relative newcomer to Coral Park. 'I never realised how busy it would get. It's very hectic; lorries arriving one after another all through the day.'

Sandra Thomson is the only woman working at Coral Park. According to Steward Diamond, lots of women drive fork-lift trucks but it's the first time Acorn has had a female FLT driver. Ask the lads what they think of a lady FLT driver and back come the speedy (and predictable) replies: 'Who says she's a lady?'; 'Who said she could drive a fork-lift truck?'

'They enjoy giving me a hard time', says Sandra, 'but they're not a bad bunch. You have to have a good sense of humour to work here.'

And you have to be prepared to pull your weight, too. According to Sandy Boyd, if one of the team makes a mistake, the others really let him, or her, know about it. But beware. They'll also leap to the assistance of any of their colleagues if an outsider attempts to dish out criticism.



Sandra Thomson at Coral Park

Dealers applaud Home and School project

In recent months Acorn has been inviting schools to participate in a special scheme designed to increase parents' awareness of the role of computers in education.

Nearly 500 schools have registered so far – possibly because they see it as a good way to stretch their limited budgets. For every Acorn computer bought by a parent at the event, the school receives a £30 voucher towards Acorn equipment.

The shows are put on by our dealers with the help of a package of promotional materials provided by Acorn. Over 100 events have already taken place, sales are encouraging and dealers are said to be 'delighted' because it not only gives them an opportunity to sell machines but it also helps them to forge closer relationships with their local schools.

Flashback to Christmas

Testing the effectiveness of their new CFC-free deodorants, left to right: Nigel Batten, Roger Wilson, Jonathan Coxhead, John Biggs, Carl Sellers, Linda Storr, Vorn Hancock, Jonathan Allin, Sue Pawson, Alisdair Thomas and Bruce Cockburn

Acorn Playgroup
Coville School
Coville Road
Cherry Hinton

Dear Sir/Madam and Staff of Acorn Computers,

I would like to say thank you on behalf of the Committee, mothers and children of Acorn Playgroup for once again supplying Father Christmas and gifts for all the children.

The party was a great success and, as you could imagine, Father Christmas was the highlight. Thank you once again.

D. L. Mitchell (Secretary)

This charming lady uses state-of-the-art crystal-gazing technology (a lampshade on top of a tripod) to predict the shape of computers in the year to come

Identity crisis

A three-year-old we know of picked up a couple of letters from well-known computer companies that had been left on a table. Recognising a familiar object on the first, he cried out 'apple!' The he picked up the second and chortled 'green egg!'

2001: will the computer replace books?

While the new decade is still in its infancy, it is interesting to look back on how computers have developed over the last ten years and to speculate on how they might continue to influence our lives in the future.

While no-one can be completely sure about what type of computer we'll be using in the year 2000, according to Roger Wilson there is considerable agreement between the specialists' predictions.

'It will be much smaller in size than today's computer, more like a thick A4 notepad that you'll be able to carry around in your briefcase like a diary. You probably won't have a keyboard, you'll write on it using a special "stylus".'

Although printing facilities will be so good you'll be able to produce paper documents with colour photographs that look as good as today's high-quality printed brochures and magazines, people probably won't do much printing. 'There'll be little point because the computers will be so cheap and communication facilities will be so good it will make more sense to communicate electronically.'

The reduction in printing will please environmentalists. What's more, a large proportion of what you'll see on your screen will be animated sequences. On the new computers these will be as fluid as anything you see on television today. You don't print out what you see on your TV, so why should you print out what you see on your computer?

Processing performance is doubling every 18 months or so. As a result, tomorrow's computers will have much more processing power. 'I estimate they'll be about 250 times more powerful than the A3000.' Minis and supercomputers will vanish over the next decade to be replaced by various categories of microcomputer. Even the few mainframes still sold in the year 2000 will probably be microprocessor-based.

'We have already developed the basic technology for tomorrow's computers; what we need now are the will and resources to make them a reality. Of course there will be many obstacles to overcome. There'll be initial resistance from traditionalists who are always frightened of new technology. And the concept of keeping in touch with portable, personal computers will only develop rapidly once the communications infrastructure is in place. That will probably require considerable government funding.'

Universities and libraries will probably be the first to have the appropriate telecommunications infrastructure. In theory, your machine could make use of software written for any other machine, but there could be considerable opposition from software publishers to this development.

Other advances will be special goggles and gloves which the user will wear to enter a 3D computer-generated world. You'll be able to speak to your computer and it will talk to you.

Instead of reading the *Financial Times* on the train, businessmen will each be looking at their personal portables. Instead of photos and accompanying text they'll see moving sequences with information at different levels so they can read as much, or as little, as they like.

Information will be recorded on laser cards. The average home will have about 10 to 20 Gbytes of storage. That's the equivalent of 10,000 books the size of *War and Peace*!

Laurie and Mary arrive safely in Australia

On 24 October last year, after much strenuous form-filling, Laurie Hardwick finally left England, with his wife Mary and son Alistair, for a two-year assignment in Australia.

The first leg of the journey was an eight-hour flight to Delhi. Expecting to spend most of that time amusing five-year-old Alistair, Laurie and Mary had prepared themselves with copious quantities of crayons, colouring books, games and puzzles. But, as all parents know, you can only rely on children to be unpredictable. Alistair fell asleep soon after take-off. 'We tried a few of Alistair's games but they seemed too complicated for us', joked Laurie. 'So we had to make do with learning the emergency information and in-flight magazine off by heart.'

The Hardwicks left the UK with 130kg of baggage in fifteen packages. On arrival in India these were transported from airport to hotel in a local taxi. 'Various bits of string

[*continued on back page*

Acorn bowled out, or scored out?

A short while ago some old friends of Acorn, OTIB Automation Technology (probably better known by their name of GST Professional Services) invited us to a Ten Pin Bowling match at the 'Big R' in Peterborough. After a little difficulty in organising a team we arranged the match for the evening of 13 December.

Our team was, reading from left to right, Bruce Cockburn, Jamie Smith, Jane Butcher, Neil Raine, Ken Millard, Julia Sampson and Jonathan Roach, and we were playing Steve Elwood, Paul Coghlan, David Hay, Serge Laserre, Nick Armitage and Ian Hannah.

(If you are mathematically squeamish, skip the next bit and start reading again at *)

Each team was organised into three pairs who would rotate after playing a game so that each pair from one team would play each pair from the other team. You may have noticed we had seven players; well, this was our cunning ploy to confuse the opposition by having one of our players drop out at each game. The results from each player in a pair were added together and this was compared with the opposition's score and the winning pair counted one point for their team. In this way nine points were allocated between the teams, guaranteeing a winner.

*After two hours of hard bowling with one or two nail-biting point-for-point games the scores came out at OTIB 7 : Acorn 2. The highest-scoring game was 159 points by Nick Armitage of OTIB, our best score being 129 by Ken Millard. Much fun was had by all, some people staying behind for some more bowling.

[*continued*]

were used to lash four cases onto the roof and six in the open boot. The rest sat on the front seat.'

'Delhi is like nowhere else I have ever been', Laurie revealed. 'Alistair will remember how the cows, pigs and goats roamed freely on the roads. We will remember the desperately poor people, the impoverished living conditions, the noise and the traffic.'

'Like all tourists, we visited the Taj Mahal, but were more impressed with the deserted city of Fatipur Sikri.' Alistair dismissed all India's architectural wonders as 'boring buildings' but was enthralled by his ride on an elephant.

Indian food can be decidedly dodgy, so Laurie and Mary were careful to avoid anything suspect during their few days in Delhi. Restrictions were relaxed once aboard their onward Air India flight and – you guessed it – Laurie spent the first two days in Singapore within fifteen feet of the hotel loo.

Once recovered, Laurie spent some time with people from Olivetti Office in Singapore and said: 'I'd like to thank George Smith in the United College of South-East Asia and Ricky Cheong from Olivetti, for their generous hospitality.'

Before taking up their new lives in mainland Australia, the Hardwicks had promised themselves a short break on Dunk Island. Here they enjoyed five blissful days of tropical sands, palm trees, cocktails and – luxury of luxuries – childminding! Everyone had a look at the Great Barrier Reef through the bottom of a glass-bottomed boat (Alistair was disappointed there weren't any whales!). Laurie and Mary got closer still by scuba diving (and Mary's still trying to get over the shock of seeing a twelve-foot manta ray pass over her head!).

Laurie reports that Acorn in Melbourne looks pretty much the same as Acorn in Cambridge. His desk already looks as untidy as usual with growing piles of work to be done. 'We're all safe and well, and our dog (who left for Australia before us in order to do her 60 days in clink), will be joining us here soon.'

Peter broils in New Zealand spring over Christmas

Peter Harrod, who now works for ARM in Cherry Hinton, enjoyed a good old-fashioned family get-together last Christmas – in spite of spending it in the middle of a New Zealand summer!

His sister is married to a New Zealander whom she met while at university in the UK. They have been living in Christchurch for eight years and now have four children. Peter's parents also live in New Zealand now.

Accompanying Peter on the trip were his wife Adele and daughter Alison. 'Undertaking a trip of some 12,000 miles with a one-year-old is not to be taken lightly', explains Peter. 'So we decided to stop over in Los Angeles to make things a bit easier.'

Apart from celebrating Christmas and the New Year, the family were also able to mark two other special occasions, Alison's first birthday and Peter's little niece's birthday. 'It was strange being so warm at Christmas', admits Peter. 'But we tucked into turkey and ham as usual before playing cricket in the garden.'

'We didn't do much sightseeing, but did manage a trip to Hanmer Springs where you can sit in 40°C thermal pools.'

New Names New Faces

Alistair McGregor
Support Service Manager
Brian Salter
Corporate Affairs Manager

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Consumer Business Unit
25 - 28 February:
RADAR
14 March - 7 April:
Ideal Home Exhibition
3 - 4 April:
NARE/NSNC, Humberside
14 - 16 April:
European Computer Trade
17 - 19 April:
COT 16th Annual Conference, Norwich

Education Business Unit
March:
Northern Ireland IT Conference
Northern Ireland NAPE
4 March:
Welsh IT Conference, Llandudno
7 - 9 March:
The Education Show, Olympia
13 March:
BEEA, NW, Manchester
21 March:
Ed Resources Ex, Birmingham
April:
DesTech Conference
2 April:
NATE Conference, Plymouth
3 April:
MAPE, Glasgow

International Business Unit
13 - 20 March:
CEBIT, Hanover

VAR Business Unit
5 - 6 March:
English Nursing Board Conference
16 - 18 April:
Human Resources Development

X/Open BASE XPG3

All Hours

Lights were on until well into the night, seven days a week, in the months leading up to Christmas as the UNIX team put the finishing touches to a new release of RISC *iX* – Acorn's implementation of UNIX.

All this feverish activity was led by Mike Challis with valuable contributions from Mark Taunton, Steve Hunt, John Bowler, Aideen McConville, Steve Cormie, Kevin Welton and David Roberts. At the end, a rigorous test suite, which comprised over 6,000 tests and took no less than six hours to run, was used to check out every little bit of the system.

After several false starts, the system was fully validated and given its AMR (advanced manufacturing release). Nothing is released to production unless it has this pink slip. This one's issue, like many others before it, was celebrated in the time-honoured fashion.

The latest version of RISC *iX* complies with X/Open's XPG3 – the current UNIX standard. The standard is so exacting that the independent body which controls it, X/Open, takes seven books to describe it. Paul Tanner of X/Open was said to be extremely pleased – and not a little surprised – that a small, independent company like Acorn had managed to produce a compliant operating system and environment, when many larger companies, with bigger resources, had not as yet. *X/Open is a trademark of X/Open Company Limited.*

Contributions to 'Comment' via E-mail

Produced by DCN Associates, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk